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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

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Key stories in the media:  
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Over the weekend all media reported that on Saturday night police sappers disarmed a powerful 100-kg bomb in a car outside Haifa's Lev Hamifratz shopping mall, thwarting a potential terrorist attack in

the city. HaQaretz, which dubbed the bombing plan Qunusually sophisticated,Q reported that a senior source in Hizbullah told the newspaper yesterday that he suspects that Hizbullah or another organization with links to Iran was behind the attempted bombing. According to the source, the PA holds definitive intelligence that Hizbullah has been trying for some time to recruit members of Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad in an attempt to get operatives of those terror groups to carry out an attack in Israel, as HizbullahQs aim is to carry out a massive terrorist attack that would avenge the assassination of its mastermind terrorist, Imad Mughniyah, in Damascus in February 2008.

The media reported that yesterday Labor Party Chairman Ehud Barak appointed coalition negotiators, ordering them to produce a finished agreement with Likud by tomorrow, so that he can present it to the party's convention when it meets that afternoon to decide whether Labor should join a Likud-led government. Labor and Likud negotiators will meet this morning for a marathon session to finalize details of the agreement, whose outline has already been settled by Barak and PM-designate Benjamin Netanyahu. In addition to Barak retaining his current position of defense minister, Labor is demanding three other ministries -- agriculture, national infrastructure, and the industry, trade and labor portfolio -- plus one minister without portfolio. Barak and Netanyahu had agreed that Labor would receive five ministers, one deputy minister and one Knesset committee chairman, but did not sign on the specific posts. A significant portion of the agreement will be devoted to socioeconomic issues, since the economic crisis is one of Barak's main arguments for joining the government. The Labor Party convention appears evenly split between opponents and proponents of joining the government. The media reported that yesterday outgoing PM Ehud Olmert launched an unprecedented attack on BarakQs coalition plans. Media quoted Olmert as saying at yesterdayQs cabinet meeting that anyone not working off the premise of two states for two peoples is Qdeluding themselves and the public.Q Olmert said that if the new government does not actively pursue the formation of a Palestinian state, this could cause Israel Qirreparable damage. Leading media reported that last night Likud signed a coalition agreement with Shas, which will reportedly receive the interior (under Eli Yishai), construction and housing (under Ariel Atias, including supervision over the Israel Lands Administration), religious affairs portfolios, as well as a ministry without portfolio in the Prime MinisterQs Office and a post of deputy minister.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Ofer Dekel, the GOIQs chief negotiator for Gilad Shalit, told Egyptian mediators that Israel will agree to resume negotiations with Hamas for ShalitQs return only if Hamas submits a new list of prisoners for Israel's consideration. The media reported that on Sunday, Hamas's most senior prisoners held a special meeting at Ketziot Prison to discuss Israel's offer. The media reported that yesterday Hamas set up a Qprotest tentQ in Gaza in which it placed a Gilad Shalit-like puppet. Media reported that Dekel and Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin may return to Cairo to renew the talks over ShalitQs release.

HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that DM Ehud Barak decided not to implement at this time demolition orders against nine houses in the West Bank settlement of Ofra that were built on private Palestinian land.

The Jerusalem Post and other media quoted Deputy DM Matan Vilnai as saying yesterday that the IDF should take control of areas inside Gaza from which mortar shells are fired at southern Israel. HaQaretz reported that yesterday GOC Home Front Command Maj. Gen. Yair Golan defended the IDFQs adherence to wartime moral standards, despite testimony by troops serving in Operation Cast Lead who described lax rules of engagement in the Gaza Strip. He was quoted as saying: "The reports were exaggerated and any deviations from the IDF's moral standards will be dealt with."

The Jerusalem Post cited a publication by IsraelQs Institute for National Security Studies that a new U.S. report on threats directed against the U.S. -- signed by Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair -- focuses on progress in IranQs nuclear arming, not on its freeze.

Leading media reported that, contrary to earlier reports, EgyptQs

Ambassador to Israel will attend the 30th-anniversary celebrations of the peace treaty between the two countries. Yesterday, The Jerusalem Post reported that Ambassador Cunningham will speak at the event. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that senior Foreign Ministry officials are trying to alleviate the tension between presumptive foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman and Egypt.

HaQaretz reported that the U.K. informed Israel that it will not push through changes in legislation that permit the arrest of IDF officers visiting Britain on war crimes, as previously expected.

HaQaretz reported that on Saturday the Fifth World Water Forum in Istanbul praised Israel as the world leader in recycling water.

HaQaretz's Washington correspondent wrote a feature about the U.S. Army's anthropologists and language specialists.

Leading media quoted banking mogul Nochi Dankner as saying that the treasury is not doing enough to tackle the financial crisis.

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q[Secretary Clinton's] declaration that Israel is the one who must decide whether it supports a two-state solution is obviously deceptive. This principle has not been an Israeli matter, or even a regional one, for some time now.

Professor Eyal Zisser, the Chairman of the Department of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the online service [nana10.co.il](http://nana10.co.il): QThe new Israeli government has been accepted with a surprising degree of equanimity [in the Arab world.]

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz: QBarak and Netanyahu deserve each other. Barak is afraid of being left out. Netanyahu is scared to be left inside, alone. But don't worry: The day will come when they too become ridiculous myths, just like Olmert.

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz: QPrepare for the next war and the horrific testimonies about the most moral army in the world [sic].

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QWe don't set out to kill innocents -- and if we do, our society feels anguish. [Palestinian terrorists] set out to kill civilians -- and when they fail, they're disappointed.

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1. QEnough with the Cosmetics

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/23): QIf the U. S. is serious about its declarations of friendship with Israel and its commitment to ending the conflict, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton needs to pass up on some of the makeup. Her declaration that Israel is the one who must decide whether it supports a two-state solution is obviously deceptive. This principle has not been an Israeli matter, or even a regional one, for some time now.... Instead of volunteering for the cosmetics corps, politicians, artists and educators who do not consider themselves part of the right's policies should stay home and focus on exposing our real face. They must explain to the youth that there is no Qenlightened occupation. Let them tell the immigrants from Russia that the Palestinians lived in Ashkelon and [the posh West Jerusalem neighborhood of]

Talbiyeh many years before them, and remind everyone that more than 20 years ago, the Palestine Liberation Organization gave up on 78 percent of Israel/Western Palestine.

## II. QArab World Awaits for Bibi with Equanimity

Professor Eyal Zisser, the Chairman of the Department of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the online service nana10.co.il (3/22): QThe noise and uproar that have accompanied the establishment of the Netanyahu government have mainly been restricted to Israel, and have barely come to the fore in the Arab world that surrounds us. There the new Israeli government has been accepted with a surprising degree of equanimity.... First of all, there is the disappointment with the Olmert government and the desire to prove that the events of the past number of years insofar as pertains to Arab-Israeli relations, stemmed from the failings and failures of that government and its prime minister.... Second, a prevalent view both in the Arab world and beyond it is that right wing governments often take surprise initiatives and that only right wing governments have the capacity to produce a breakthrough in relations between Israel and the Arab world.... Beyond all that, it is important to bear in mind that the Arab world is still in a euphoric state because of Barack Obama's election as the president of the United States.

## III. "The Olmert Myth and Barak's Problem"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz (3/23): QEven before the tears have dried over the approaching death of Ehud Olmert's government -- after a long, drawn-out period at death's door -- another new myth is making the rounds: Olmert was a good prime minister. Not just good, but excellent. Sharp. Decisive. Involved in the details and developments.... The most interesting facet of the Olmert myth, which even the bearers of the tale admit, is that reality on all its levels -- security, political, economic

and social -- is actually quite depressing. A bad situation and a good prime minister is an Israeli miracle.... The government fell to its lowest point last week over the negotiations to free Gilad Shalit.... The person who is actually appropriate for the American system [of government] is Ehud Barak. It would be appropriate for him to serve as a personal appointee of an elected leader -- not as the leader of a party in his own right, like his friends Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld served their presidents. Barak has a relative advantage from his military track, in his expertise and understanding, and in his approach that integrates a broad vision with detailed knowledge. As a politician, whose profession is the human soul, he is hopeless.... Barak and Netanyahu deserve each other. Barak is afraid of being left out. Netanyahu is scared to be left inside, alone. But don't worry: The day will come when they too become ridiculous myths, just like Olmert.

## IV. "Israel Defense Forces?"

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz (3/22): QThe IDF knew very well what its soldiers did in Gaza. It has long ceased to be the most moral army in the world. Far from it -- it will not seriously investigate anything.... Change will not come without a major change in mindset. Until we recognize the Palestinians as human beings, just as we are, nothing will change. But then, the occupation would collapse, God forbid. In the meantime, prepare for the next war and the horrific testimonies about the most moral army in the world.

## V. QPurity of Arms

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/23): QStarry-eyed idealists -- at home and abroad -- hold Israel to a different standard [than Palestinian terrorists]: Do we conduct ourselves 24/7 as paragons of virtue unhindered by the character flaws that burden ordinary mortals? And when -- surprise, surprise -- we fall short of this yardstick, they denigrate us as being no better than our enemies. How else to evaluate the so-called testimonies of troops who served in Gaza, solicited and disseminated by Dani Zamir, founder of the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military preparatory course at Oranim Academic College outside Haifa? They allege that due to Qloose rules of engagementQ several Palestinian civilians were needlessly killed during Operation Cast Lead.... Zamir's

uncorroborated claims help blur the distinction between Qus and them.Q But we don't set out to kill innocents -- and if we do, our society feels anguish. They set out to kill civilians -- and when they fail, they're disappointed.

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12. Iran:  
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Summary:  
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Yoram Ettinger, chairman of special research at the Ariel Center for Policy Research, a former Minister for Congressional Affairs to Israel's Embassy in Washington, and a former Consul General of Israel to the Southwestern U.S., wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/23): QThe prevention of a nuclear Iran constitutes a top U.S. national security priority. It sheds light on a special aspect of U.S.-Israel relationship: defiance of mutual threats.

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"Iran Targets the U.S."

Yoram Ettinger, chairman of special research at the Ariel Center for Policy Research, a former Minister for Congressional Affairs to Israel's Embassy in Washington, and a former Consul General of Israel to the Southwestern U.S., wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/23): QThe prevention of a nuclear Iran constitutes a top U.S. national security priority. It sheds light on a special aspect of U.S.-Israel relationship: defiance of mutual threats.... Iran's nuclear threat is a symptom of endemic Middle East violent unpredictability and Muslim hostility toward Western democracies. It calls for an upgraded U.S.-Israel win-win relationship, which requires a strong Israel as a national security producer. A weak Israel, pushed into a nine-15 mile sliver along the Mediterranean, pressured to concede the mountain ridges of Judea, Samaria [i.e. the West Bank], and the Golan Heights, relying on foreign troops and guarantees, would become a national security consumer. It would be a burden rather than an asset to the U.S. in a bad neighborhood, which is crucial for vital U.S. interests. Iran would benefit from an ineffective Israel. However, the U.S. would have to deploy to the eastern flank of the Mediterranean real aircraft carriers and tens of thousands of US servicemen, costing scores of billions of dollars annually, denied the benefits of Israel -- the largest U.S. aircraft carrier, which does not require a single U.S. sailor.

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